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RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 6645
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RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 1641
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0211
RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 3994
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2340
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000606

SIPDIS

POSTS FOR IRAN WATCH AND CONSULAR SECTIONS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2017

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [IR](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS' SCRUTINY OF IRANIAN TRAVELERS
A FAR CRY FROM U.S. SYSTEM

Classified By: DCM NANCY MCELDFOWNEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (S) Summary: Queries to Iranian visa applicants regarding how they obtained visas to travel to countries other than the United States revealed that in most cases obtaining a tourist visa is simply a matter of filing the proper forms and paying the requisite fees. The relative ease with which Iranians from different walks of life can obtain foreign visas suggests that previous travel abroad may be of little consequence in informing the decision of consular officers on whether to grant an Iranian a visa to the U.S. This ease of travel to countries that have close ties to the U.S. also shows that Iranians have many routes by which they can obtain access to U.S. goods, information, and technology may otherwise be unavailable in Iran. End summary.

SAME DAY SERVICE, NO RESTRICTIONS APPLY

12. (S) A group of Iranians recently interviewed had previous travels to Canada, Cyprus, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, Tajikistan, Thailand and the UK.

According to the applicants, Canada at one time required a personal interview as part of the visa process; however, a thirty six-year old pistachio farmer told officers that he interviewed at the Canadian embassy in Tehran for the visa he received in 2000, but in 2006 he was able to renew the visa simply by filing paperwork. This man also told us that while he did have to appear for an interview in 2000, he is a member of the Canada-Iran Chambers of Commerce, which took care of all the paperwork for him in 2000 for his business trip. An accountant told us that he did not have to interview for his Canadian visa issued in 2004. In the case of the UK, applicants told us they went to the UK embassy in Tehran in the morning to drop off their applications along with documents showing they owned property and bank accounts, and returned in the afternoon to collect their visas.

13. (C) Most of the applicants interviewed had traveled in Europe, with the UK being the most frequent destination. The most common purpose of travel was visiting relatives residing in Europe. Like the UK, we found that no interview was required for obtaining visas for France, Germany, and Italy. Visa procedures for these three countries are essentially the same, as they are members of the Schengen Agreement. Under the terms of this agreement, holders of a tourist visa issued by any one Schengen Agreement member state are permitted to travel to all other member states free of border checks. Currently fifteen countries have both signed the Schengen Agreement and implemented its visa procedures, with several

more countries in the process of implementing the Schengen visa program. Thus, in theory, an Iranian issued a Schengen visa by the Italian Embassy in Tehran, could travel to Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden without having to apply for any other visas or submitting to any visa interview.

14. (S) Several applicants had traveled to Asian countries for vacation. These people said they used Iranian tourism companies that completed all the visa paperwork for them as part of the tour package. We learned from two applicants that no visa is required for Iranians to travel to Malaysia. This is noteworthy given the high incidence of Iranian companies and individuals using Malaysia as a purchase, staging, and transshipment point for export-controlled U.S.-origin goods ultimately destined for Iran. Neither of our two travelers to Russia (one for business, one for pleasure) was required to interview for their visas, as was the case with our traveler to Tajikistan.

15. (C) Some countries may be restricting their visa regimes. One twenty six year-old student told us that when she went to Cyprus in 2000 no interview was required but she believes an interview would be required today. Iranians currently do not need a visa to enter Turkey. While Post has repeatedly requested Turkey implement more rigorous border checks for Iranian visitors, Turkish government officials have told us privately that this is not a priority for them, that it will adversely affect the tourism industry with Iran which they see as an opportunity to give Iranians a window on the world, and that no action would be taken on this until Turkey's EU accession talks progress further.

PAY ON YOUR WAY OUT

16. (S) Based on these interviews, it appears that the real restrictions on Iranian travel to destinations other than the U.S. is the ability to pay. As Iranian visa applicants occasionally confide to us, with money, anything is possible.⁸ Iranians must pay a departure fee and receive an official stamp in their passports in order to leave the country. According to an Iranian travel agent, the fee can be paid in advance at a bank, at the time of departure at the airport, or a travel agency can do it for you in advance. The travel agent added that the fee amount varies depending on the country to be visited, with the fees being highest for the most popular destinations. For example, the travel agent told us the fee for Turkey is approximately \$30, while the fee for the U.S. is about \$50. While this departure fee requirement is a source of income for the government of Iran, open-source reporting indicates it also provides Iranian authorities a chance to spot dissidents and other anti-regime elements seeking to flee the country.

17. (C) Comment: The apparent ease with which Iranians can travel to destinations other than the U.S. presents challenges and opportunities. The lower level of scrutiny other governments place on Iranian travelers could make it easier for them to engage in nefarious activities from terrorism to money laundering, to acquire WMD-related materials and technology. Likewise, the ability of Iranians to travel to countries allied with the U.S. could facilitate meetings between U.S. individuals and Iranians who wish to support U.S. policy on Iran. End comment.

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